

LEXINGTON, KY: HELM PLACE

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# Kentucky

## Counties & Towns

Lexington  
Helm Place

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The Helm Place on Bowman Mill Road near Lexington is one of the classic exam-  
ples of Georgian architecture that ornament Kentucky's rolling Bluegrass area.

## Haunted by History

Even its two ghosts, both of whom spook French, tie in  
with the intriguing past of this beautiful old mansion

By SUE McCLELLAND THIERMAN

**H**ELM Place, six miles out of Lexington  
on the old Bowman Mill Road, has  
beauty enough, inside and out, to  
account for its fame as a showplace of the  
Bluegrass.

But that isn't all—not half of it!

Helm Place has an intriguing past, a rosy  
future, and, to make its story even more  
fascinating, it has a couple of ghosts. One, a  
French-speaking ghost, no less.

Abraham Lincoln, or at least his in-laws,  
figures twice in the pillared old mansion's  
past. Lafayette, too—he was indirectly respon-  
sible for the ghosts.

And Lincoln, or his memory, will play a  
leading role in the future of Helm Place, since  
its present owner is one of the nation's most  
distinguished Lincoln authorities, Lexington  
lawyer William H. Townsend.

Back around 1775, a certain gentleman from  
Virginia named Levi Todd came to Kentucky.  
About 1779 he erected a fort on what was  
then the pioneer road from Lexington to  
Harrodsburg. Todd, one of early Lexington's  
first citizens, had a son named Robert. In his

turn, Robert Todd later had a daughter named  
Mary, who today is somewhat better known to  
the world than either her father or her grand-  
father. She married the man named Abraham  
Lincoln.

After Levi Todd abandoned his fort for a  
new home on the other side of Lexington, the  
land passed as a military grant, into the hands  
of another Virginia gentleman, Col. Abraham  
Bowman.

Bowman was a renowned Revolutionary  
hero, having commanded the Eighth Virginia  
Infantry. His superior officer was the Marquis  
de Lafayette himself. Bowman and Lafayette  
had become intimate friends, their mutual  
affection probably dating from the time in  
1777 when they were both wounded in the  
Battle of Brandywine Creek.

(We'll come to the ghosts in a minute!)

On his new land, Bowman first erected  
a small four-room brick house, in which he  
resided until his fine new mansion was ready  
for occupancy. This charming little garden  
house is still in use today. Completely re-  
stored, it now serves as a week-end cottage





Mrs. Mary Genevieve Edwards, daughter of the house's owner, William Townsend, is standing near a portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln, painted by Katherine Helm.

for the Townsends and their friends. This small building was converted by Bowman into slave quarters, the first of a double row of 24 slave cabins, it is recalled.

Colonel Bowman must have maintained a considerable establishment. He had four sons, three daughters, and a stepson. He built and operated a prosperous mill on South Elkhorn Creek, which flows in front of the home. This mill, which gave the road its name, was a grist and saw mill. No longer in existence, it was in operation until the early 1900's.

Bowman owned at least 150 slaves. An unusually high percentage of these were men of uncommon abilities, meticulously trained craftsmen and artisans: wheelwrights, carpenters, woodcarvers, masons.

As a result Colonel Bowman's house was no common house. It is one of the classic examples of Georgian architecture which ornament this region. Its massive columns, its handsomely detailed portico, its graciously framed doorway, all are typical of these elegant homes.

The ruddy old bricks—"hurned on the place"—are laid in Flemish bond, and the clay pit, from whence they came, today provides the quiet pond just within the entrance of the grounds. The larger pond behind the barn is where the stone came for the foundation.

No one has been able to establish the exact date for the construction of Bowman's old place. Townsend, its present owner, discounts the date most often suggested, 1791. Too early, he says. Kentucky homes built at this early period are almost invariably of Federal design. The Georgian portico more probably suggests that Bowman built his home somewhere between 1810-1830.

Townsend tells about the ghosts of Helm Place this way: In the spring of 1825, Lafayette's return visit to this grateful nation was the signal for a delirium of festivities all up and down the country. Colonel Bowman made plans to receive his old friend and comrade-in-arms on a certain day in May.

But Kentucky's treacherous spring weather spoiled Bowman's plans. It rained and rained and rained that week. Little South Elkhorn was flooded and Bowman's Mill Road was a lane of mud.

Bowman had to meet Lafayette at the home of a daughter, Polly. Polly Bowman had married a young man named Keen, and her home was quite the equal of Bowman's in every respect.

Bowman and his family and a number of slaves made it to the Keen Place. The two old gentlemen, Bowman and Lafayette, along with all the other Revolutionary heroes they could muster up, had a splendid time.

As events later developed, the old soldiers weren't the only ones who had a splendid time. When Lafayette gathered his entourage to depart, his valet, a young Moroccan lad, begged to be allowed to remain in Kentucky. He had, he confessed, fallen violently in love with a pretty octroon who belonged to Bowman.

Bowman and Lafayette conferred. At length the two masters reached this decision: Lafayette agreed to part with the boy, and Bowman gave the girl her freedom as a wedding present.

So the two were married, and, as in the fairy tales, lived happily ever afterward in Bowman's brick cottage.

*Continued on following pages*

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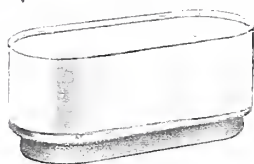
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## The Helm family's tenure lasted from 1912 until 1946

### HOUSE OF HISTORY *Continued*

The spirits of the young Moroccan boy and his pretty octoroon bride are still there in the little house, smiled Townsend. Their voices have been heard many times by the local colored population. Happy voices, speaking "some foreign language," presumably French.

Reluctantly, Townsend admits that he has never heard them, but he enjoys telling the story after dark to visitors spending the night in the little house.

One visiting "city girl" was noticeably disturbed upon hearing the story. About 3 o'clock in the morning, she heard "all sorts of commotion" around the house. Everyone thought sure they'd finally heard the ghosts, and were awfully disappointed when it later developed that all the commotion was "just the pigs got out!"

After Bowman died, his heirs divided the estate and slaves. The old place gradually deteriorated, and toward the beginning of the new century, was in a sad condition.

IN 1912 the Helms bought the old Bowman Place, moved from Louisville to begin its renovation, and gave it the name which it bears today.

The Helms must have been foolhardy folk to undertake the restoration of the abandoned old home—their first act was to chop down the young tree which was growing out of the fireplace in the front parlor!

A dining room was added in the back, and a sun porch was formed by enclosing the original back porch. The house was furnished with the Helms' Early American and ornate Victorian pieces they had brought with them from their former homes in Elizabethtown and Louisville.

The handsome bronze knocker was affixed to the heavy front door. The unbelievably elaborate crystal chandeliers were hung in the front hall and the dining room. Quaint old shutters, from their Louisville home, formed the dado in the new dining room.

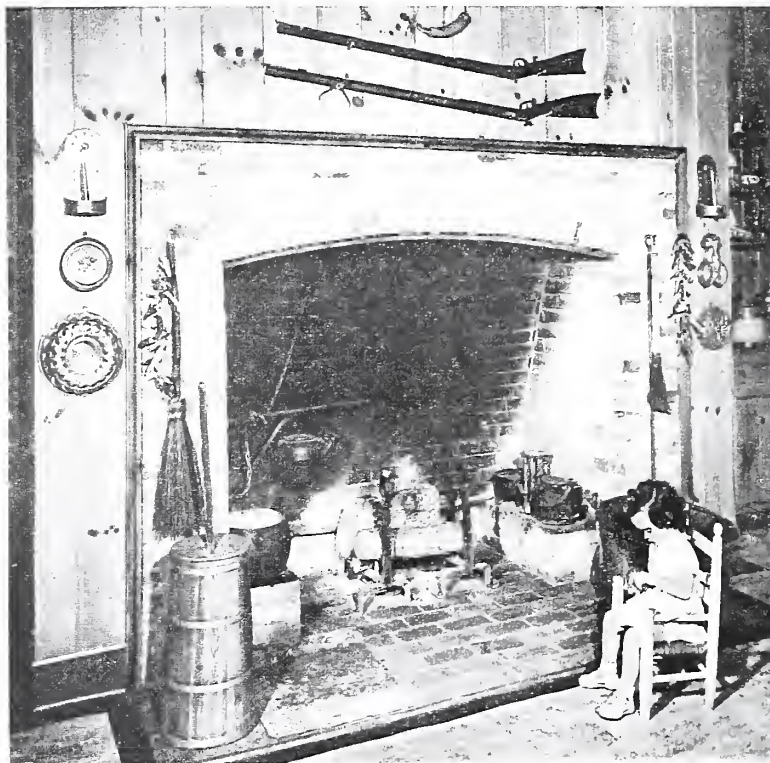
Aside from all this, the Helms added considerably to the historical luster of their new home. The matriarch of the family was the widowed Emilie Todd Helm, whose husband was the distinguished Confederate general, Ben Hardin Helm. He had commanded the First Kentucky Brigade of Infantry, Breckinridge's Division. His command had been christened the "Orphan Brigade" because so many of its officers were killed in action.

FOR years now a branch from the tree under which General Helm died has been mounted in the great entrance hall of Helm Place, and the gallant officer's pistols, swords, rifles, and spurs are hanging from it.

Even more distinguished than her husband was Emilie Todd's sister. This was the same Mary Todd who had married Abraham Lincoln. (Mrs. Helm had lived on the place for some time before she discovered that her own grandfather, Levi Todd, had been the first settler there.)

Some of the furniture at Helm Place today is from the old Todd home on Lexington's Main Street, including the two parlor chandeliers.

In 1863, Emilie Todd Helm had been left a widow at 26, with three tiny children. Abraham Lincoln invited this young sister-in-law to Washington, to make her home there with him and his wife, Mary. But



Elodie Edwards, 2, grand-daughter of Townsend, sits in front of the kitchen fireplace at the historic Helm Place. The fireplace was restored by Townsend.

be was forced to issue a special pass for her safe conduct through the lines. Emilie had staunchly refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Union even to gain sanctuary at the White House.

In 1912, when the Helms moved into the old Bowman mansion, Emilie Helm was an old woman, and the three tiny children were well into middle age. Ben Hardin, Jr., and Katherine, the youngest and oldest, respectively, had never married.

"Miss Katherine" made quite a name for herself as both painter and writer. Her book "The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln," was serialized in McCall's in 1928.

Her portraits and landscapes literally cover the walls of Helm Place. A life-size likeness of her father, the general, in full Confederate officer's uniform, hangs in the entrance hall.

A three-quarter-length portrait of Mary Lincoln, painted from a daguerreotype, hangs beside the mantel in the front parlor. Two similar portraits of Mary Lincoln were given by Miss Katherine to Robert Todd Lincoln, who in turn presented one to the White House, where it now hangs.

The younger Helm girl, Elodie, had married Waller Lewis, but he died four years before she moved with the Helm family to Helm Place. Now the family was reunited once more.

### AUTHOR, AUTHOR!

She's back again—Sue McClelland Thierman of Lexington with another story for Magazine readers. And this, like her others, is illustrated by her husband, John Thierman, an excellent photographer.

One by one the Helms died, each living to a considerable old age. Finally only Elodie—Mrs. Lewis—was left. She lived on in the old house until last summer, when she died, at the age of 95.

Which brings the story down to the present owners of Helm Place and its rosy future. Lexington's William H. Townsend purchased the old place in 1946 from Mrs. Lewis, with the understanding that two downstairs rooms be reserved for her use as long as she might live. Townsend also promised "Miss Dee" that he would retain the name Helm Place.

Her garden, which she and Miss Katherine designed and planted, has been christened "Elodie Garden," and a bronze plaque has been placed there in her memory.

HELM Place is occupied by Townsend's daughter, Mary Genevieve, and her husband, Thomas Edwards. Providentially, for the future welfare of the old house, Edwards is by profession an architect. Under his and Townsend's direction, the old house is once more undergoing a thorough renovation. The whole place was wired for electricity and made generally more livable soon after it was purchased from the Helms.

The original kitchen behind the house has been restored. Now, the entrance hall, the upstairs hall, the two parlors, and the dining room are being completely "done over," for the first time in 40 years.

The inch-and-a-quarter-thick-asb flooring has been sanded down to a rich cream, then shellacked to a gleaming gold. The walls and the ceilings have been stripped down to the still-sound plaster. To everyone's astonishment, after two layers of



wallpaper had been steamed off, the final and original layer in both parlors proved to be an incredible screaming crimson, patterned with a garish floral design!

Most amused was Mary Genevieve—she had already reluctantly abandoned her first selection of a wallpaper design of timid stripes, fearing it might be too “loud” for the tremendous reaches of wall space it must cover!

Most exciting are Townsend's plans for the two rooms now left vacant since Mrs. Lewis' death. These rooms Townsend hopes eventually to make into a repository for his nationally known collection of Lincolniana—his priceless Lincoln letters, documents, and pictures, the fascinating personal articles which belonged to Lincoln and members of his family.

The front room will form his Lincoln Library, while the back room will be made into a Lincoln Museum.

“It will be the first time I've ever had my collection all together in one place,” Townsend says wistfully. “Right now it's scattered all over.

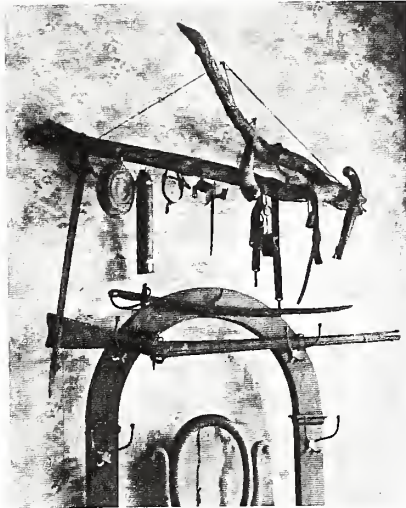
“THERE are, you know, three states intimately associated with Abraham Lincoln—Kentucky, the state of his birth and childhood; Indiana, the state of his boyhood, and Illinois, the state of his maturity.

“Today, the school children and historical students of Illinois have the large Lincoln and Civil War collection of Judge Henry Horner, now in the Illinois Historical Society.

“The school children and history students of Indiana have Benjamin Oakleaf's collection, now at Indiana University.

“Kentucky, through the years, has had no such collection.” This is the situation, Townsend indicates, which he has been working half a lifetime to remedy. He says:

“It has been my earnest desire, since I began collecting this material more than 30 years ago, that some day my collection would be large enough that school children and his-



Some of the Civil War gear of General Ben Hardin Helm hangs in the house from a limb of the tree under which he died.

torical students of Kentucky—and especially those of Lexington and Fayette County—should not have to go to these distant places in order to study Lincoln and the period of history in which he lived.”

Both rooms will be paneled in cherry, adds Townsend. The trees for this were, in the best tradition, “cut on the place” two years ago, and the lumber is seasoning right now in the barn behind the house. When it is properly seasoned, Townsend's long-cherished dream will begin to take form.

When his plans are finally completed, and his Lincoln collection is housed here, Helm Place will rank among the finest Lincoln museums in the world—and what could be more appropriate than that!



This is the brick cottage, formerly quarters for slaves, behind the big house. A servant of Lafayette and his bride lived there once. and still dwell there, it's said, in spirit.

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SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1953 29



# Lincoln Relics Not Contradictory In Home Of Confederate General's Widow

By Betty Lee Mastin  
Herald-Leader Home Page Editor

Visitors to the Blue Grass call it a contradictory country. They point out, for example, that the name of Lincoln is revered here even by many who consider themselves by tradition and sympathy, rebels still.

Nowhere are the contradictions—and the reverence—more evident than at Helm Place, white-columned brick mansion five miles from Lexington on Bowman Mill Road just off Harrodsburg Road.

Here, in a house long home to the widow of a Confederate brigadier general, are the "books Mr. Lincoln loved," along with a Sleepy Hollow rocker in which he sat to read them.

The contradictions are understood by visitors who know that the general's widow, Emilie Todd Helm, was the half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, Kentucky-born wife of Kentucky's greatest son.

Owner of house, books and rocker is William H. Townsend, local attorney who is one of America's foremost authorities on Lincoln.

Certainly not least even in Townsend's collection of Lincolniana is Helm Place, the house in which Lincoln's sister-in-law lived her last 18 years.

A week-long visit by Mrs. Helm to the White House after the death of her husband, Gen. Ben Hardin Helm, at Chicksauga caused bitter criticism of the president and his wife.

The general's widow, still in her 20s, was not at the White House of her own volition, Lincoln informed one caller.

The visitor had told the president, "You should not have that rebel in your house."

"My wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests. We do not need from our friends either advice or assistance in the matter," Lincoln replied.

He added, "The little 'rebel' came because I ordered her to come."

Mrs. Helm had indeed been ordered to Washington. Lincoln, who had secured the pay that allowed his newly widowed sister-in-law to leave the South, wired soldiers, "Send her to me," when she was detained because she refused to take the oath of allegiance.

Mrs. Helm's diary records that in the White House, "This frightful war comes between us like a barrier of granite closing our lips but not our hearts, for though our tongues are tied, we weep over our dead together (the Lincolns had lost their small son Willie; Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Helm had lost in the war three brothers, in addition to Mrs. Helm's husband), and express through our clasped hands the sympathy we feel for each other in our mutual grief."

"She (Mary) and Brother Lincoln put me as if I were a child, and without words try to comfort me."

Mrs. Helm wrote that her presence in the White House embarrassed "all of us" and soon left for Kentucky.

She and her mother, Mrs. Lincoln's stepmother, made their home in Lexington until, Mrs. Helm told Townsend before her death in 1930, the strain of not knowing who in the postwar years was friend or enemy made the two move to Madison, Ind., "where one could assume all were enemies."

After her mother's death, Mrs. Helm and her three children moved to her husband's hometown, Elizabethtown, and later from there to Louisville.

The family bought Helm Place in 1912. To Mrs. Helm, it meant coming home to more than just the Blue Grass since her grandfather, Gen. Levi Todd, had built the pioneer fort, Todd's Station, which stood in ruins on the hill

behind the house. The fort had fallen into disuse after the establishment of Lexington.

The big brick house had been built probably in the 1830s or 1840s, Townsend says, on part of 8,000 acres acquired by Col. Abraham Bowman, Revolutionary soldier who served under Lafayette.

The colonel came to Fayette County in 1781.

Bowman, who died in 1837, bequeathed to his wife his fine "mansion house."

(A smaller, two-story dwelling, now used as a tenant house, is believed to be an earlier home of the Bowman family.)

The big house has walls laid in a pattern called Flemish bond. A portico supported by ionic columns dominates the front.

Smaller columns support the cornice over a Greek-inspired door.

Inside, a large hall divides the main mass of the house. To the right are large double parlors divided by sliding doors framed by a eased opening flanked by ionic columns.

Hanging in the house are four family portraits by Kentucky artist Matthew Jouett and a number by Mrs. Helm's daughter, Katherine.

Among the latter is one of two similar portraits of Mary Todd Lincoln. The other hangs in the White House.

Katherine Helm also wrote a biography of her famous aunt that Townsend describes as a "fine book written, of course, from the family viewpoint."

The attorney's interest in Lincoln caused his first visit to Mrs. Helm and the house in 1920. The two families—at that time all three of Mrs. Helm's children were living—became friends and, in 1926, Townsend bought the property from the surviving child, Mrs. Elodie Helm Lewis.

Mrs. Lewis made her home in the house until her death in 1953.

Helm Place now is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Townsend's daughter, Mrs. Mary G. Edwards, and her daughter, Elodie Elizabeth.

Elodie, who is five, was named for Mrs. Lewis and Miss Elizabeth Brown, a friend from childhood of the Helms.

Miss Brown, who is called "Aunt Bess" by the Townsends, is 92. Born in September, 1864, (Lincoln was killed the following spring), she recalls that when she first visited the Helm family at what, before their time, had been called Cedar Hall, the log runs of Todd's Station still stood.

She remembers that the Sleepy Hollow rocker was called "Mr. Lincoln's rocker" by the Helms.

Lincoln sat in it to read books from Robert S. Todd's library, today also at Helm Place.

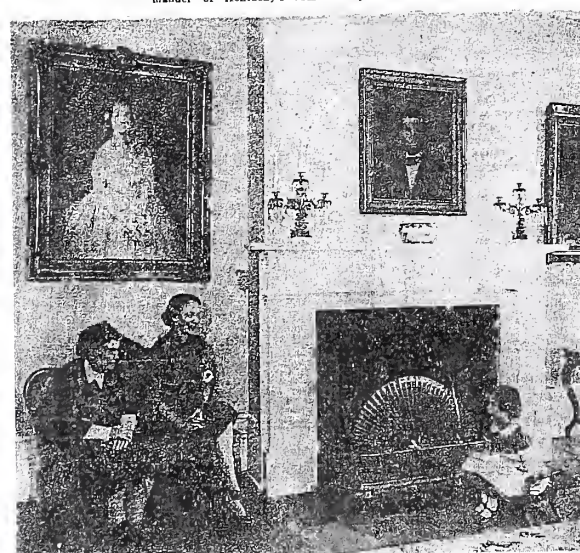
Lincoln used both rocker and books in the Todd home, which still stands on West Main Street.

Townsend notes that, ironically, the rocker is almost exactly like the one in which the president sat in the box at Ford's Theater the night he was assassinated.

That was, of course, April 14, 1865, just 92 years ago tonight.



HALL AT HELM PLACE—Low risers, wide treads make an easily ascended stair at Helm Place, former home of Emilie Todd Helm, widow of Confederate Gen. Ben Hardin Helm. Helm was commander of Kentucky's famed "Orphan Brigade."



FAMILY PORTRAIT—Portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln was painted by her niece, Katherine Helm. Pictured here is Miss Elizabeth Brown, a friend from childhood of the Helm family, with the Townsends' daughter, Mrs. Mary G. Edwards, and her daughter, Elodie Elizabeth.

She and her mother, Mrs. Lincoln's stepmother, made their home in Lexington until, Mrs. Helm told Townsend before her death in 1930, the strain of not knowing who in the postwar years was friend or enemy made the two move to Madison, Ind., "where one could assume all were enemies."

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Elodie, who is five, was named for Mrs. Lewis and Miss Elizabeth Brown, a friend from childhood of the Helms.

Miss Brown, who is called "Aunt Bess" by the Townsends, is 92. Born in September, 1864, (Lincoln was killed the following spring), she recalls that when she first visited the Helm family at what, before their time, had been called Cedar Hall, the log runs of Todd's Station still stood.

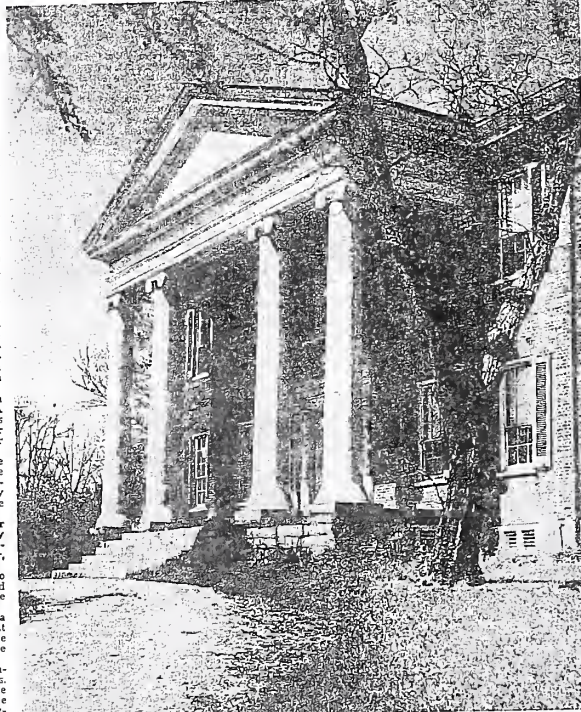
She remembers that the Sleepy Hollow rocker was called "Mr. Lincoln's rocker" by the Helms.

Lincoln sat in it to read books from Robert S. Todd's library, today also at Helm Place.

Lincoln used both rocker and books in the Todd home, which still stands on West Main Street.

Townsend notes that, ironically, the rocker is almost exactly like the one in which the president sat in the box at Ford's Theater the night he was assassinated.

That was, of course, April 14, 1865, just 92 years ago tonight.



OWNED BY LINCOLN AUTHORITY—Helm Place now is owned by Lexington attorney William H. Townsend, one of America's foremost authorities on Lincoln. Mrs. Helm was Lincoln's sister-in-law.



KITCHEN FIREPLACE—Elodie, who is five, stands before large old kitchen fireplace. Giant burr oak still standing at the entrance of the farm was an early militia muster ground.



Helen. Dooey.

Brought

Answer Collection

Answer Miss. Harriet





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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC Helm Place; Cedar Hall

AND/OR COMMON

Same

## 2 LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Bowmars Mill Road

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

06

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Fayette

CODE

067

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORY

— DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

— STRUCTURE

— SITE

— OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

— PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

— BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

— IN PROCESS

— BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

— UNOCCUPIED

— WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

— YES: RESTRICTED

— YES: UNRESTRICTED

☒ NO

## PRESENT USE

— AGRICULTURE

— COMMERCIAL

— EDUCATIONAL

— ENTERTAINMENT

— GOVERNMENT

— INDUSTRIAL

— MILITARY

— MUSEUM

— PARK

☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

— RELIGIOUS

— SCIENTIFIC

— TRANSPORTATION

— OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. and Mrs. Joe H. Murphy, Jr.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Bowmans Mill Road

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

STATE

Kentucky

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Fayette County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

215 W. Main

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

STATE

Kentucky

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic Survey and Plan for Lexington and Fayette Co., Ky.

DATE

1970

— FEDERAL — STATE ☒ COUNTY — LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Lexington-Fayette Urban Co. Planning Commission

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

STATE

Kentucky

(continued)

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Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky  
1971 State  
Kentucky Heritage Commission  
Frankfort, Kentucky

# DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT  
☐ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED  
☐ ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This great Kentucky Greek Revival house is situated in a commanding position on an eminence above Bowman's Mill Road, Fayette County. As was typical of the Greek style in Central Kentucky, a broad sweep of cleared ground along with the drive directly approached the main facade of the house in the most imposing manner. A screen of trees was apparently originally thrown about the sides and back of the residence; all contributing to the impression of a classical temple on a knoll projecting from a grove.

The order of the house is a simplified and monumental Ionic, the four columns of the colossal portico being brick with plaster (photo 1). The columns are intentionally spaced so as to leave the widest span in the center, and by this means, to stress both the central axis of the facade and to throw notice upon the elaborate frontispiece consisting of Ionic pilasters, entablature, side lights and transom (photo 2). The bases of the great columns are somewhat of a mystery, having no attempt at a correct moulding, but instead having a base of flared plaster or compo-cement. These may have been damaged and plastered over at some time; or possibly the house is a simplified and somewhat archaic early version of Greek Revival residential architecture in Central Kentucky. This explanation seems hardly likely, however, as the pairs of columns dividing the double parlours of the interior have quite correct Ionic bases. In any event, the interior plaster and millwork is quite as elaborate as the exterior ornamentation is reduced and monumental.

Certain of the fine interior details of Helm Place may be compared to another early Fayette County Greek Revival residence: Lemon Hill on the Cleveland Road, built sometime shortly after 1840 (Clay Lancaster, Ante Bellum Houses of the Bluegrass, pp. 104-105.) Like features between the two houses are a number of the built-in cupboards, which with their great cavetto mouldings have a distinctly Egyptian Revival flavor not common to Bluegrass houses (photo 5).

The plaster centerpiece of the main hall at Helm Place (photo 3), also corresponds to the dining room medallion of Lemon Hill, and both are very nearly identical to plate 21, a centerpiece design in The Beauties of Modern Architecture by prominent New York Greek Revivalist, Minard Lafever (first published, New York, 1835, with editions in 1839, 1849, and 1855). Other Lafever type details appear in Helm Place, the screen with Ionic columns and sliding doors separating the double drawing rooms of the house, possibly being adapted from Plate 25 of The Beauties of Modern Architecture. (Clay Lancaster, Ante Bellum Houses of the Bluegrass, p. 84).

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Helm Place, unlike the more absolute and puristic examples of American Greek Revival domestic architecture, is not laid out on a "Temple format." Instead of the portico resolving itself out of the gable ending of the short dimension of a rectangular plan, Helm Place's tetrastyle Ionic portico is placed upon the long side of the rectangle (photos 8 and 9). This creates a very strong cross axis, cutting through the short dimension of the plan in the form of a long central hall at the rear of which a square staircase rises around three walls (photo 4). Four chambers: double parlours on one side and a library and what must have originally been the dining room on the other, are disposed symmetrically on either side of the hall. These four chambers, along with a back gallery and a kitchen detached by a covered breezeway, must have comprised the original floorplan of the residence (photo 9).

The plan and front elevation of Helm Place seems to be an adaptation, or interpretation, of a pair of plans and elevations for two "Country Villas" (photo 10), grouped on the same page of The Builder's Guide, or a Practical Treatise on the Several Orders of Grecian and Roman Architecture etc..., by Chester Hills. (First published, Hartford, 1834, with later editions in 1836, 1846, and 1847. See H. R. Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, p. 50).

Helm Place most closely corresponds to the righthand Villa, but takes and simplifies elements from both plans (i.e., the square staircase from one plan, the fireplaces located against the outside walls from the other). The dimensions of Helm Place, its hall being 12'x40' and the chambers just slightly less than 20'x20', are somewhat larger than the Hills Designs.

The plan of Design I of the Hills Guide with its circular staircase contained within the rear of the central hall closely recalls the plan of The Elms, a Greek Revival Villa (now demolished), noted by Clay Lancaster as being a mate to Helm Place (Ante-Bellum Houses of the Bluegrass pp. 100-101; see also Illustration 11). The Elms was built for William Leavy previous to 1854 by local builder-architect John McMurtry. It seems a fairly reasonable assumption, then, that these two Fayette County Greek Revival houses, so closely

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corresponding to the twin plans found in the Hills Guide, could have been by the same architect: namely McMurtry, who doubtless possessed the Hills source.

Whereas Helm Place takes many of its design cues from the Eastern Greek Revival style publications, such as the Lafever and Hills sources, the house also displays characteristics much more traditionally associated with Bluegrass architecture. For example, the front facade and side walls are of Flemish bond brickwork, and in the more conservative fashion of Central Kentucky, never appear to have been painted white or monochrome to correspond with the portico, but instead have retained their natural dark reddish-brown hue. This coloration and the surface textural patterning created by the Flemish bond brickwork was more typical of earlier Kentucky Federal architecture than of the Eastern Greek style.

THE DATING OF HELM PLACE:

The fact of Helm Place seeming to take its basic design from the Hills Guide introduces the question of dating. The first edition of the Builder's Guide was published in 1834. In 1836 Colonel Abraham Bowman made a will which bequeathed, among other items, the "mansion" to his son, George H. Bowman. It is tempting to conclude that the "mansion" referred to in 1836 was the present Greek Revival house and that Helm Place was, then, constructed between 1834, the first date the Hills Guide would have been available in Central Kentucky, and 1836, when Col. Bowman's will was made. This, however, is speculation, for the house could have been adapted from the Hills pattern at any date following 1834, and the "mansion house" referred to in Col. Bowman's will could have been an earlier residence built by that gentleman which was later replaced by his son George. If 1834-1836 could be put forward as a possible date for the house, it would make Helm Place a very early example of domestic Greek Revival in Fayette County, the Grecian style supposedly having been first introduced in Civic architecture by Gideon Shryock in 1830-33 by his design and building of Morrison Hall on the Transylvania University campus in Lexington. The more typical Greek residences in Fayette County date from the 1840's and 1850's.

In 1858, George H. Bowman advertised a house off Harrodsburg Road for sale as being "recently built." (See attached advertisement, The Kentucky Statesman.)

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If this advertisement (December 21 and 24, 1858) refers to Helm Place, the term "recently built" becomes significant. In 1858 what would "recently built" have meant? At sometime within the past two to five years? Or could the term have applied to a house built in 1834-36 in an architectural style which was, in the 1850's, still a highly popular mode of building? Until further evidence arises, the question of the exact dating of Helm Place may remain unanswered.

From: The Kentucky Statesman, December 21, 24, 1858.

"FAYETTE LAND FOR SALE!

On Monday, January 10th, 1859.

County Court Day, at the Court-House door in Lexington,

I will, as trustee of GEO. H. BOWMAN, sell the farm on

which he resides. The Farm is 6 miles from Lexington, near

the Higbee's Mill, on the Harrodsburg Turnpike, and is one of

the most desirable Farms in the county. There are

550 A C R E S

Which will be sold together, or divided into three tracts.

The First, including the improvements, contains 350 acres;

On this tract is a

L A R G E B R I C K R E S I D E N C E

Recently built and in good repair; and one of the best country residences in Fayette County; also

BARN, STABLES, NEGRO HOUSES,

and other improvements usually found on such places.

State the place must be sold - "for the debts must be paid".

John B. Payne, Jr.

Trustee of Geo. Bowman

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912-13

The only structural changes which have taken place were done in 1812-13 when the Helm family purchased the house and property. At that time, the rear gallery was completely enclosed to create: a glassed sun porch, a dining room, a pantry, a downstairs bath, and a small side porch. (See present plan versus restored plan - Illustrations 7 and 8). The only structural deletion which appears to have been effected in this process was one of the square brick piers supporting the rear gallery roof, which was removed to accommodate the dining room extension. The additions were done in frame (photo 7).

Upstairs, the front hall was partitioned off to form a small dressing room or morning room, and the entrance and direction of the stairs leading on to the attic was reversed.

Elaborate crystal chandeliers were added to the front hall and dining room, supposedly from the Mary Todd Lincoln House in Lexington. Shutters from Mrs. Helm's former Louisville home formed the dado in the new dining room.

The additions were simple and sensitively accomplished, and two of the changes, the upstairs dressing room and the downstairs dining room, were embellished with architectural wall murals of pastoral scenes painted by Katherine Helm, who was a Kentucky artist of some note, having been trained at the Art Student's League in New York, with a period of study under William Merrit Chase, an important American painter. Katherine Helm also kept a New York studio for a number of years. An example of her work today hangs in the Lincoln Room of the White House and Helm Place is the repository for many of her paintings, both portraiture and landscape.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Helm Place is an exceptionally interesting house with both architectural and historic significance. It is a particularly important example of the domestic Greek Revival in Central Kentucky; at once illustrating both forms and techniques indigenous to the region in which it was built, and influences from outside sources acting on the region, as exemplified by the Eastern Architectural Pattern-Books, which formed the single most important outside influence upon the Greek Revival style in Central Kentucky. It was built by a member of the distinguished Bowman family, either Col. Abraham, who settled in Fayette County in 1781, or his son, George H., who inherited the estate and sold it in 1872. Later the family of Civil War General Benjamin Hardin Helm, whose widow Emilie was a half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, owned the house from 1912-1946.

In 1775 General Levi Todd came to Kentucky from Virginia, and in 1779 erected a fort known as Todds Station on a road between Harrodsburg and Lexington. General Todd, one of the earliest and most prominent settlers in Kentucky, and one of the founders of Lexington, became the clerk of the first court held in the Western County, and was appointed the first Clerk of the Fayette County Court, which office he held until his death in 1814. He served under General George Rogers Clark, and succeeded Daniel Boone as commander of the Kentucky Militia.

When General Todd left Todds Station, the fort passed into the hands of Colonel Abraham Bowman by a military grant.<sup>1</sup> Colonel Bowman also purchased approximately 8,000 additional acres of land in the vicinity of the Station about five miles Southwest of Lexington on South Elkhorn Creek.<sup>2</sup> The whole farm was known as Cedar Hall, after the Bowman family farm in Virginia. This name remained until 1912, at which time it was renamed Helm Place by the Helm family after their ancestral home near Elizabethtown, Kentucky.

1 Louisville Courier Journal, 25 October, 1953.

2 Lexington Herald-Leader, 14 April, 1957.

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From the many accounts given of Colonel Bowman, it is evident that he was a very prominent figure both in Virginia and Kentucky. He commanded the 8th Virginia Infantry during the Revolutionary War and served directly under General the Marquis de Lafayette. Both Colonel Bowman and the Marquis were wounded at the battle of Brandywine Creek, and when Lafayette visited Lexington, the two men rode along together in a carriage during the welcoming ceremonies. On May 15th, 1825, Lafayette was entertained by Bowman at the house of his daughter, Polly Keene. It was at this gathering that Colonel Bowman made a speech in which he noted that Kentucky's Fayette County had been named in Lafayette's honor.<sup>3</sup>

In 1780, Kentucky County was divided into Jefferson, Fayette and Lincoln Counties, and under a commission by Governor Jefferson, 13 gentlemen were authorized to qualify as justices over this newly divided land. Colonel Bowman was one of the 13 men. In 1781, Colonel Bowman, at the age of 30, took a wife, Sarah, who was the widow of his companion, Colonel David Bryan, who had been killed in battle.<sup>4</sup> In 1792, Bowman, then a General, was elected one of the representatives and electors of the Senate from Fayette County under the first state constitution.

On Colonel Bowman's land, he erected a small four room cottage in which he and his family lived, presumably until the building of the later residence, the present Greek Revival house. Bowman also built and operated a prosperous grist and saw mill on this land on South Elkhorn Creek, which gave the nearby road its name. The mill is said to have been in operation until the early 1900's.<sup>5</sup>

Although there is no documentation that Colonel Bowman was the builder of the present house, Helm Place, there are some accounts which indicate that he might have been. Colonel Bowman's great-grandson, A. Smith Bowman, is noted to have said: "I have never known a home built by a Bowman either in Virginia, Kentucky or Louisiana which was not of the highest type of architectural design."<sup>6</sup> The Colonel

3. John W. Wayland, The Bowmans (Staunton: The McClure Company, Inc., 1943), p. 136.

4. Ibid., pp. 105-107.

5. Louisville Courier Journal, 25 October, 1953.

6. Wayland, The Bowmans, pp. 112-113.

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owned over 150 slaves, of which a large percentage were supposedly carpenters, woodcarvers, masons and wheelwrights.<sup>7</sup> This presupposes that he had at his disposal the manpower and skilled laborers to erect a residence of the size and style of Helm Place. The bricks from the mansion were said to have come from a clay pit which today is a quiet pond down the drive from the house, and a larger pond behind the barn is where the stone for the foundation of the house was supposedly quarried.<sup>8</sup> It appears more reasonable, however, that Helm Place was built by George H. Bowman, his son, who along with his mother, Sarah, inherited the major portion of Col. Bowman's estate in 1837.<sup>9</sup> (See complete discussion of its date in Section 7, Architectural Description.) A house was included in their portion, and upon Sarah's death, her interest went to George, but this could have been an earlier residence. In 1859, George sold the estate to A. J. Reed, who in 1872 sold it to Noah H. McClelland.<sup>10</sup> McClelland sold the estate to Jeremiah McMeekin in 1873, who then sold it to H. F. Hillenmeyer in 1895.<sup>11</sup> By 1905, the estate had reverted back to the McMeekin family who deeded a portion of it to Estill McMeekin in 1905.<sup>12</sup> Estill McMeekin deeded this same portion to G.M.D. Minor the next month of 1905.<sup>13</sup> In 1909 a Special Commissioner, J. Corbin, turned the estate over to John McMeekin.<sup>14</sup> In 1912, John McMeekin sold the estate to Emilie, Katherine and Ben Hardin Helm.<sup>15</sup>

The Helm family was the second prominent family to reside at Helm Place. While Colonel Abraham Bowman actively participated in the Revolutionary War, General Benjamin Hardin Helm (whose widow and children were the purchasers of the house) fought and died during the Civil War. General Helm was born in 1831 and was the son of Kentucky Governor John L. Helm, one of the most distinguished men in Kentucky. He entered the Kentucky Military Institute at an early age, but soon left to attend West Point Military Academy from which he graduated in 1851. After illness halted his active duty he resigned his commission, and studied law at the University of Louisville and at Cambridge. Over the next few

- 7 Louisville Courier Journal, 25 October, 1953.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Fayette County Will Book N-255.
- 10 Fayette County Deed Books 35-43 and 50-506.
- 11 Fayette County Deed Books 51-568 and 42-598.
- 12 Fayette County Deed Book 138-511.
- 13 Fayette County Deed Book 138-514.
- 14 Fayette County Deed Book 156-352.
- 15 Fayette County Deed Book 168-299.

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years, Helm served as a State Legislator, Commonwealth's Attorney, and Assistant Inspector-General of the State Guard. Around 1860, he visited President Lincoln, and was offered a commission in the Union Army. Circumstances, however, led Helm to offer his services to the Confederacy, and in 1861, he became Colonel of the First Kentucky Cavalry. In 1862, he was promoted to Brigadier-General and served under General Breckinridge, actively engaging in various campaigns. In the Battle of Chickamauga Helm was mortally wounded and died September 20, 1863,<sup>16</sup> leaving behind his wife, Emilie Todd, and their three small children.

Emilie Todd Helm was the grand-daughter of General Levi Todd, who originally occupied the land to the rear of that on which Helm Place was built by the Bowman family. Widowed and alone with three babies, the oldest only four, she was invited to the White House to live with her half-sister, Mary Todd Lincoln, and her husband, President Abraham Lincoln. As Emilie was a Confederate, she refused to take the oath of allegiance to the Union, and President Lincoln had to issue a special pass for her safe conduct across the Union lines.<sup>17</sup> When criticized for housing a rebel, Lincoln said: "My wife and I are in the habit of choosing our own guests. We do not need from our friends either advice or assistance in the matter. The little 'rebel' came because I ordered her to come."<sup>18</sup> Emilie Helm wrote that her presence in the White House embarrassed "all of us," and, therefore, she soon returned to Kentucky and lived in Lexington for a time. She then moved to Madison, Indiana, thence to her husband's hometown Elizabethtown, Kentucky, thence to Louisville, and finally to Lexington and Helm Place in 1912.<sup>19</sup>

Emilie bought the Bowman House and renamed it Helm Place, possibly intending to spend her last years there. Two of her three children were unmarried and lived therewith her. Katherine, her daughter, became a well-known artist and writer. Her book, THE TRUE STORY OF MARY, WIFE OF LINCOLN, was serialized in McCalls in 1928. Many examples of her paintings are in Helm Place today. (See Section 7, Physical Appearance.)

- 16 J. M. Armstrong, Biographical Encyclopaedia of the Dead and Living Men of the Nineteenth Century (Cincinnati, 1878), p. 438.  
17 Louisville Courier Journal, 25 October, 1953.  
18 Lexington Herald-Leader, 14 April, 1957.  
19 Ibid.

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In 1928, Emilie deeded the estate to her son, Ben Hardin Helm, who passed it on to his sister, Elodie Helm Lewis.<sup>20</sup> In 1946, Elodie sold the estate to William H. Townsend, with certain understandings.<sup>21</sup> The first was that Mr. Townsend would reserve two downstairs rooms for her use as long as she might live, and the second being that he would retain the name Helm Place. Everything Mrs. Lewis had in the house was sold to Mr. Townsend, and still remains in the house. Mr. Townsend, a nationally known author, Lincoln authority and Lexington attorney, first visited Helm Place and Mrs. Emilie Helm in 1920.<sup>22</sup> Mr. Townsend, whose picture hangs at the University of Kentucky Alumni House in the Gallery of Distinguished Alumni, was presented with the Most Distinguished Attorney Award, by the Fayette County Bar Association in 1961. It was his great interest in Lincoln which spurred his visits to and his continuing concern for Helm Place. He never actually lived there but had plans for its renovation, and his daughter, Mary Genevieve, moved in and had the house wired for electricity and generally made more livable. The original kitchen behind the house was restored, and the entrance hall, the upstairs hall, the two parlors, and the dining room were redecorated for the first time in 40 years.

After Mrs. Elodie Helm Lewis' death in 1953, Mr. Townsend began plans for the two rooms left vacant. He had great hopes to eventually make these rooms into a repository for his nationally known collection of Lincoln memorabilia - priceless letters, documents, pictures and fascinating personal articles which belonged to Lincoln and his family - the largest private collection in the world. The front room was to be the Lincoln Library, and the back room, a Lincoln Museum. Cherry trees had been cut on the farm in 1951 and were seasoning for use as paneling in the two rooms. Mr. Townsend's plans were, unfortunately, never completed. There are, however, numerous Lincoln items which still remain in the house.

In 1973, Mr. Townsend's wife, Genevieve, deeded the house to her daughter, Mary Genevieve Murphy.<sup>23</sup> Presently, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy and Mrs. Townsend reside there. Mr. and Mrs. Murphy are continually working on the upkeep of this historic home to keep it in its magnificent state of beauty, much as it must have been a century-and-a-quarter ago.

- 20 Fayette County Deed Book 251-107.
- 21 Fayette County Deed Book 408-49
- 22 Lexington Herald-Leader, 14 April, 1957.
- 23 Fayette County Deed Book 1096-384.






## MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES




(See attached Bibliography)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY

### UTM REFERENCES

A     
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C   

B			
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
-------	------	--------	------

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
AL	001	ALBANY	001
AL	002	ALBUQUERQUE	002
AL	003	ALBUQUERQUE	003
AL	004	ALBUQUERQUE	004
AL	005	ALBUQUERQUE	005
AL	006	ALBUQUERQUE	006
AL	007	ALBUQUERQUE	007
AL	008	ALBUQUERQUE	008
AL	009	ALBUQUERQUE	009
AL	010	ALBUQUERQUE	010
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**FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Pat Snadon

ORGANIZATION

ANIZATION University of Kentucky Dept. of Interior Design DATE August, 1977  
TELEPHONE

STREET &amp; NUMBER

TELEPHONE

258-9000

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Kentucky

CITY OR TOWN  
Lexington

**STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL —

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

NPS USE ONLY  
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Helm Place; Cedar Hall

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Helm Place; Cedar Hall

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WORKS CONSULTED:

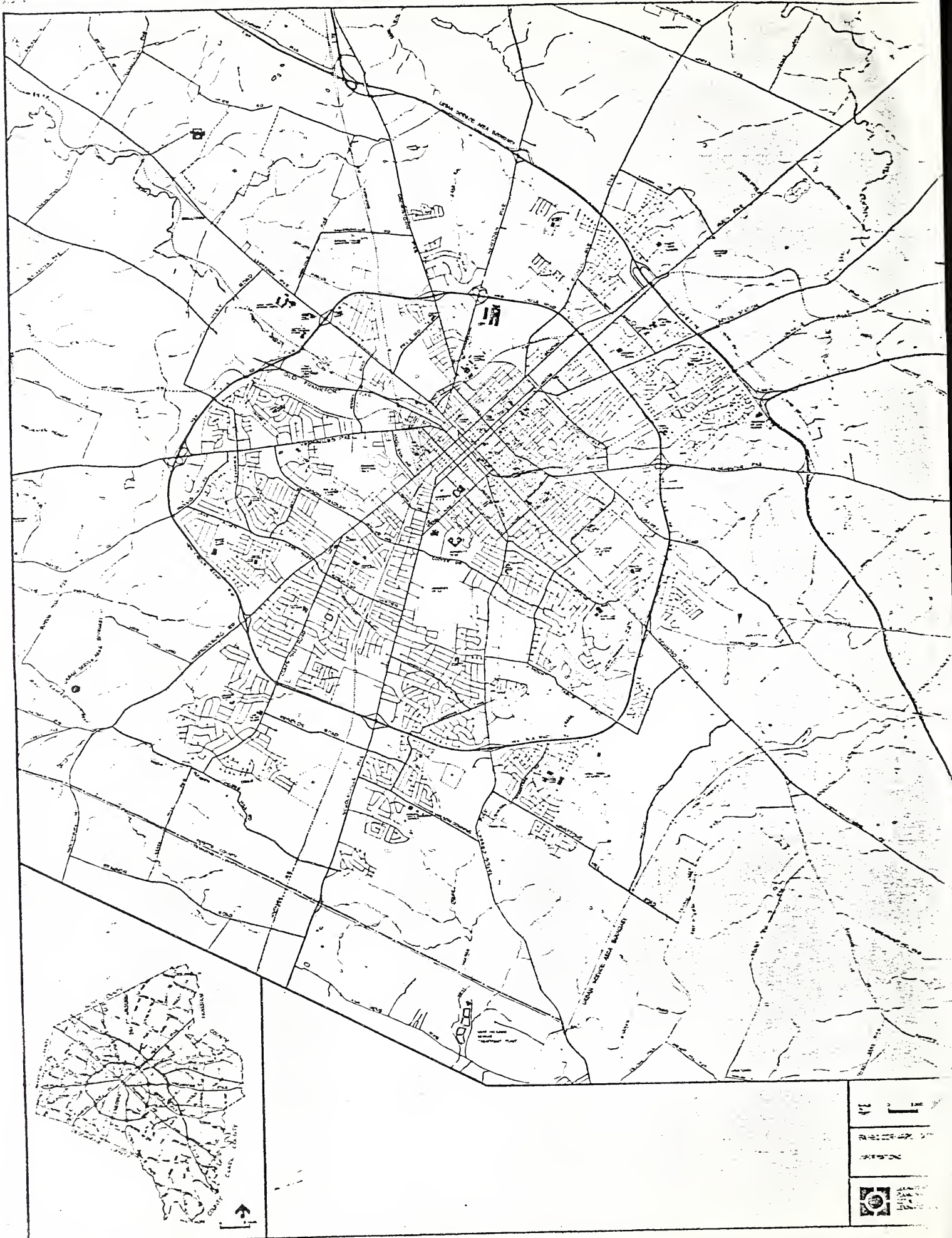
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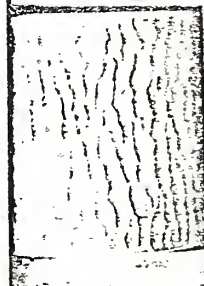
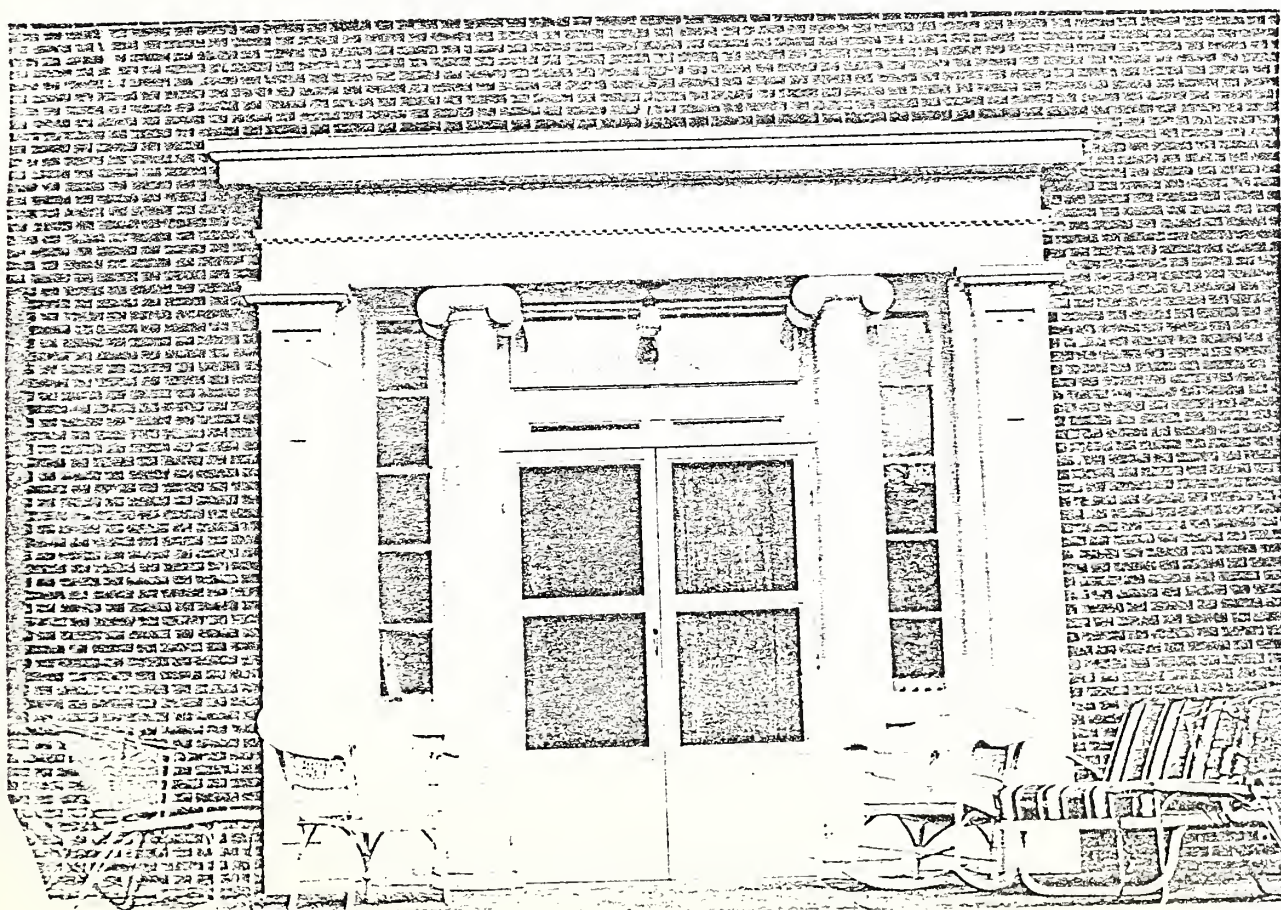
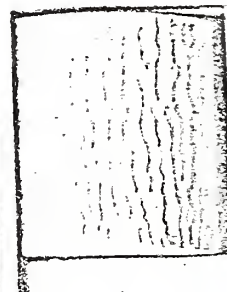
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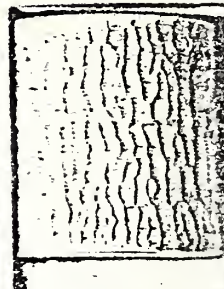


Helm Place; Cedar Hall  
Lexington  
Fayette County  
Kentucky

Pat Snadon  
420 W. Second  
Lexington, Kentucky  
August 1977

Photo 1. Helm Place--front  
facade.

2. Helm Place, front facade

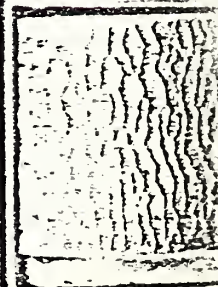


Helm Place; Cedar Hall  
Lexington  
Fayette County  
Kentucky

Pat Snadon  
420 W. Second  
Lexington, Kentucky  
August 1977

Photo 2. Helm Place -  
frontispiece.

3. Helm Place, Frontispiece





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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Helm Place (Governor John Larue Helm House)

AND/OR COMMON

Same

## 2 LOCATION

STREET &amp; NUMBER

U.S. 31-W, 1½ miles north of

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Elizabethtown

X VICINITY OF

02

STATE

Kentucky

CODE  
021COUNTY  
HardinCODE  
093

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

## CATEGORY

DISTRICT

X BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

PUBLIC

X PRIVATE

BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

X OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

X NO

## PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

X OTHER

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Wright

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Comprehensive Care Center  
Offices

CITY, TOWN

Elizabethtown

X VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hardin County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Elizabethtown

STATE

Kentucky

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky

DATE

1971

FEDERAL X STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Kentucky Heritage Commission

CITY, TOWN

Frankfort

STATE

Kentucky

## DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☒ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED  
☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Helm House is located about one and one-half miles north of the center of Elizabethtown on U.S. 31-W, the old Louisville-Nashville Pike also known as the Dixie Highway, in Hardin County.

The house, constructed originally from 1832-1840, still stands in a commanding position on a hill on the site of the original fort and homestead. A nearby spring runs down to Freeman Creek, which runs north-south east of the house in a shallow wooded depression. (The stream is dammed a short distance north of the Helm property to form a manmade lake set in Freeman Lake Park. On a promontory overlooking the lake on the west side is the recently restored Hardin Thomas log house, also known as the Lincoln Heritage House, which was listed on the National Register, March 26, 1973.)

For many decades the house was only a distant gleam of white concealed among trees on the thickly wooded hill but today it is easily exposed to view. The house itself, however, is still surrounded by old trees and remnant of former landscaping (see 15). The land sloping away to the east toward the creek and beyond has not yet been developed although it is prime real estate amid rapidly expanding subdivisions. The land between the house and the highway to the west has been levelled and become part of the "strip" with highly incompatible development.

This exploitation of the land has also affected the Helm family cemetery, several hundred yards south of the house, now left high and dry with the ground cut away to its rough stone boundaries on all but the east side, which is still contiguous with the undeveloped property (see photo 18). Local attempts to protect the cemetery and provide access to it have so far proved in vain.

The wife of the second owner of Helm House, John Larue Helm, Jr., the former Lucy Amelia Washington of Nashville, Tennessee, was responsible for having an ellipse laid out in the center of the circular drive which was in front of the mansion. It is believed that it was patterned after the one at the Hermitage, the home of President Andrew Jackson, located east of Nashville. Only a special variety of sweet peas were planted in the ellipse. Little, if anything, remains of this interesting feature, however (compare photos 2 and 3). At present the house is approached by a truncated curved drive that passes between modern brick gateposts centered in front of the house (photos 15-16).

The house was basically an almost square two-story brick block with central halls flanked by two rooms on both sides on both floors and a transverse attic story (photos 1, 5-8). There must always have been an ell, but that seems to have suffered the most

(continued)



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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Helm Place

CONTINUATION SHEET

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changes. The foundations are of carefully shaped and textured stone. The front faces almost directly south, although the present road to Louisville has a more northwesterly direction. The facade has five rather widely spaced bays, the center three of which were originally hidden by the entrance feature (photo 4-5). The sides of the house are also very wide, with two large flush chimneys flanked by windows on both sides (several perhaps blind with false shutters); the windows appear to be paired in the centers of the sides on all three stories. There may always have been galleries across the back of the house. One original or early room just north of the northeast corner of the main block is separated from it by a narrow space that may once have been an open corridor, breezeway, or "dogtrot" (as similar features in log houses are called).

The unique feature shown in the old photographs was the two-story entrance (photos 4-5). The scale of the gable, defined by the full but still somewhat delicate cornices (that also runs up the side gables of the house, returning at the corners), the plain if attenuated Tuscan columns--all suggest the incipient Greek Revival sensibility. Stone steps led up to the recessed vestibule whose opening was flanked by paired columns that seemed to support a well-modelled if narrow entablature. The upper porch had only four columns across the front: single column centered over the pairs below and at the ends. Another entablature and cornice defined the base of the classically proportioned gable/pediment. There is little sense here of classic "correctness" in the handling of the orders, but an interesting play of geometric forms: voids and solids outlined by the slender columns.

The windows are all large, rather long, nine-over-six-pane sash. Shutters appear to have been original. Interestingly, there are dentils under the cornice of the gables but not along the front or on the porch.

The old photographs show some of the additions that had been made prior to the period of neglect in the early 20th century. Mr. and Mrs. John L. Helm, Jr., owned and lived in the house during the years 1867-1902, although after 1900 only during the summers. Probably shortly after the Civil War they installed a large bay window replacing the rear window in the dining room (northeast corner; photo 6). In order to accommodate their children's expanded social activities they later added a large two-story rear addition with a two-and-a-half-story tower on the east side between the diningroom and the new rear wing; the earlier one-story bay window abutted the tower (photo 7). The tower had a number of windows on its curved faces and shorter attic windows set in

(continued)

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Helm Place

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PAGE 3

decorative brickwork under the semiconical roof. Sleeping porches were also added on the rear of the main block and west side of the ell, with a diagonal corner and latticework below (photo 8). The old views also show smaller one-story porches at the rear and east sides of the ell, that may or may not have been added at this point.

The Helms are also said to have had a large dance floor constructed in sections so that it could be laid when needed at the rear of the house but folded up and stored when not in use. In 1893 Emilie Todd Helm, the widow of General Ben Hardin Helm, another son of the original owner, wrote an article on Helm Place for the Illustrated Kentuckian. She described it then as having "16 rooms, exclusive of halls, butler's pantry and dressing rooms."

In 1912 the house passed out of the hands of the Helm family. In 1919 the notice of an auction for the entire property included a photograph of the house and description of the property (see photo 1). From that time until 1938 the house and grounds were neglected and were abused --the former even being used for storage--as can be seen in two views showing it in that state (photo 5 and 7) which, however, ironically provide the clearest and fullest record of the appearance of the house as it evolved during the 19th century during Helm ownership.

In 1938 Judge J. R. Layman acquired the property. Although he owned it for only a year, he made drastic changes in the residence. It was he who removed the tackrooms and porches of the entrance feature, perhaps leaving the gable intact except for the insertion of a circular ventilator opening (see photo 16). The stone foundations of the original entrance also remains as part of the present porch floor, and old bricks and window frames were used to fill in the gaps left in the front wall of the main block by the removal of the tackrooms. The original front entrance is no longer protected by the vestibule. The wide door with a handsome turn-of-the-century bevelled-glass inset is slightly recessed and flanked by original slender colonnettes. The transom above is also bevelled-glass. The similar doorway that had opened onto the upper front porch was shortened and converted into a double window. At this time also all the additions to the main block at the rear and in the east side were removed.

The Paul Marions, who bought the house in 1945, improved the condition of the remaining house and grounds, and added a one-story service wing to replace the much larger one removed in 1938 (see photo 18). This wing may incorporate at least the foundations

(Continued)



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of an early or even original brick room several feet north of the northeast corner of the main block, as mentioned above.

The interior of the house retains many original elements. There is a fairly wide central hall divided in the center by double folding doors. The staircase at the rear is basically of the late Federal type rising from the left to a landing over the back hall door and thence, forward to the upper hall. The fine railing and newel post are slender and simple, and there are acorn-shaped pendants under the angles, but no stringer. (There are no visible traces of the mural showing groves of birch trees that was supposed to have been painted between 1832 and 1867 above the chair-rail along the stairway by Mary Helm, a crippled daughter of John Helm, Sr.)

The woodwork throughout the downstairs of the main block has strong, symmetrically grooved moldings with geometric concentric cornerblocks (see photos 9-11). Upstairs, however, the mill work is simpler, of the Federal type (photos 12-13 the Federal mantel shown in photo 12 is conceivably original). Some chair-railing remains. The double folding doors between the two parlors on the west side have five horizontal panels narrowing toward the top (photo 9); other doors had three slightly graduated horizontal panels over two vertical panels (photos 11 and 13). There are also triple panels downstairs under the deepset windows.

Although the late 19th-century additions have been removed (see photo 11 for a glimpse of the dining-room bay and photo 14 for an upstairs bedroom in the tower), most, if not all, of the present mantels appear to date from the turn-of-the-century, as shown in the 1912 photographs (see photos 5, of which conceivably only the swags may have been added to the original mantel; 10; perhaps 12, 13, and 14). These are fairly handsome examples of their kind, mostly with columned overmantels, swags, and tile facing, although far more elaborate than the surviving original woodwork.

The recent adaptation of the residence for offices has not seriously affected the interiors, although the opening between the double parlors has been partitioned and some additional plumbing has been installed.

It is believed that there were brick slave quarters northwest of the house, but these have long since disappeared. There are two fairly recent frame structures north of the rear ell, which may be those shown on the 1912 view (photo 8). A large barn stands in the fields below the house to the southeast near the creek.

# SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES                      1832-40                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT                      unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Five generations of the Helm family lived on the land where Helm House stands today. Five generations of Helm men, working as surveyors, lawyers, judges, bankers, public officials, physicians, legislators, and one who became governor of the state twice, have made an impressive record in the history of Hardin County and Kentucky.

Helm Place was originally built between 1832 and 1840 for John Larue Helm, Sr., a unique and interesting example of the transition between the Federal and Greek Revival architectural styles in Kentucky. Although the most unusual feature--a two-story three-bay entrance feature with a recessed vestibule flanked by enclosed brick "tack rooms" on either side, and an elegant gabled porch above--has been replaced by a colossal portico in the 20th-century, photographic evidence of the original appearance remains. Several interesting late 19th-century additions and alterations, documented by photographs, were also removed in 1938, leaving the main block of the house essentially intact. Also included in the nomination is the Helm family cemetery, located near the house, although now isolated by surrounding development.

The story of Helm Place and the Helm family in Kentucky began in 1780 when Captain Thomas Helm, a Revolutionary war veteran from Prince William County, Virginia, brought his family and slaves to Severns Valley (near present-day Elizabethtown) in response to the lure of the western lands which had been granted to him by Virginia for his service during the war.

After coming down from the Falls of the Ohio River (later Louisville), he discovered near Severns Valley, a large spring rushing over a rocky proclivity from a cave between two wooded hills. He decided to go no farther but to settle there. For protection from the Indians he erected a strong fort at the point now known as Helm Place. He connected the fort with the spring by means of a tunnel. It became one of the three forts that formed the Severns Valley Settlement, afterwards known as Elizabethtown.

After Hardin County was established in 1792, Thomas Helm became the ranking member of the first justices of the Quarter Sessions Court. As judge he was diligent in the affairs of the court and presided at most of the trials. He was one of the original trustees

(continued)



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Helm Place

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of the Hardin Academy which was established under an act approved December 22, 1798. Judge Helm was a large, strong man, weighing over 200 pounds, and was also a large landowner in the Valley and on the outlying frontiers. His wife, Jenny, was a member of the wealthy pioneer Pope family.

After the Indians were gradually driven from the state, Judge Helm built a comfortable log house beside the old Fort. This log house served as his family home until he died in 1816. His wife died in 1821.

George Helm, a son of Thomas Helm and Jenny Pope Helm, inherited their 1300-acre farm. He had been born in Prince William County, Virginia, in 1774, had come to Kentucky with his parents in 1780, and grew up in the fort and in the log house. He took an active part in clearing the farm and superintended it until 1820. He was a highly respected and popular citizen of the county and at one time or other served in a great many civil and legislative offices. On May 14, 1801, he married Rebecca Larue, eldest daughter of John and Mary Brooks Larue of nearby Hodgenville, and the couple had nine children all of whom were born on the Helm Place. Despite his success in politics, George Helm became financially embarrassed in his business dealings about 1821 and went to Texas planning to enter business there. His plans did not materialize, however, and he died there in 1822.

John Larue Helm, the eldest child of George and Rebecca Larue Helm, was born in the log cabin on the Helm Place on July 4, 1802. He grew up on the family farm, living with his parents and grandparents and attending such local schools as there were at that time. He was a good student and became particularly proficient in the study of American history but he had to leave school when he was 16 to go to work on a full-time basis because of his father's financial difficulties. Soon thereafter, he was appointed Deputy Clerk of the Hardin Circuit Court and through his work there during the next three years he became interested in the study of law. During this time his fidelity and adaptability in the clerks' office attracted the attention of Duff Green, one of the most notable men of the state, who had also formerly been one of his teachers. In 1821 Helm became a student in the law office of the Honorable Ben Tobin, of Elizabethtown, and was admitted to the Kentucky Bar in 1823. Upon his father's death he became the sole means of support for his mother and her large family. His father's estate was sold but it failed to pay all his liabilities. The remaining debt of \$3,000 was assumed by the young Helm who gave his own personal notes for it and paid them himself as soon as his

(continued)

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own financial resources permitted.

John Larue Helm soon developed a large law practice owing in part to his own ability, in part to his many well-connected relatives, but especially to the hopelessly tangled condition of Kentucky land titles which gave rise to almost as many civil suits as there were acres of land and to numerous trials for homicide as well. In 1824 Helm was appointed County Attorney in the newly formed Meade County northeast of Hardin County because there was no resident attorney there at the time. He continued in this office for a consecutive period of sixteen years. In 1825 he was elected to the lower house of the state legislature and was one of the youngest members ever to serve in the General Assembly. He continued to serve in the state House of Representatives by successive re-elections for a total of eleven years and for five sessions he was Speaker of the House, a position in which he proved to be one of the most able presiding officers that ever filled that position. He became well known for his active defense of the "Old Court Party" in 1825 and was instrumental in the defeat of the "New Court Party" in the 1826 legislative session.

In 1830 John L. Helm was married to Lucinda Barbour Hardin, the eldest daughter of the Honorable Ben Hardin, a noted frontier attorney of Bardstown (see the National Register nomination form for his house, Edgewood, in Nelson County, listed on July 30, 1975). Later that year he and his wife moved to Elizabethtown from the country in the Nolynn neighborhood where they had been living with his mother. Records of the Sisters of Loretto who purchased the farm from John L. and Lucinda B. Helm, on which the Sisters established Bethlehem Academy, show that the Helms lived in the mansion at the time of the purchase in 1830 that later formed the center block of the Academy building. After he succeeded in redeeming his father's inheritance from his uncle, Major Ben Helm, in 1832, the younger Helm and his wife moved to his ancestral home which at that time was called Helm Station. They lived in the log house for about 8 years until the large house he began to build there was completed. This is the house seen today. It remained his home until his death in 1867. Helm and his wife upheld the Helm family tradition of large families by rearing twelve children of their own, most of whom were born at Helm Place.

John L. Helm was noted for his athletic prowess and was a good hunter and marksman. He was popular with the people and proved a good vote-getter as his long service in the

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state legislature demonstrated. In 1838 he ran for a seat in the Federal House of Representatives but was defeated by a small margin by Willis Green of Breckinridge County, one of the few political defeats during his long political career and the only time he ever ran for a national office.

While serving in the lower house of the state legislature in 1843 he was paid a great compliment when it was proposed to name a new county to be formed out of Hardin County after him. Since there were a few dissenting votes to "Helm County" which touched his pride, he declined the honor and, instead, suggested that the new county be called "Larue," the maiden name of his mother, because there were a large number of Larue families, who were the first settlers, still living in the area. This suggestion was unanimously approved.

In 1844 Helm was elected to the State Senate. In the exciting presidential election year of 1848 when the country was about to divide upon the Wilmot Proviso, Helm was elected Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky on the Whig ticket headed by the Honorable John Jordan Crittenden. In this capacity he served as the presiding officer of the State Senate in 1848-1849.

During the politically stormy 1840s one of the most important political questions on the state level in Kentucky was whether to hold a convention to form a new state constitution. When the bill to hold the convention was introduced into the legislature in 1848, Helm, who was at that time serving in the state senate, voted for its passage in order to leave the matter to the vote of the people for a final decision. He published his stand prior to the election of 1848 when he ran for Lieutenant Governor. He indicated that although he believed that the old state constitution was defective he was afraid a convention would fail to weed out the evils of the existing one and perhaps introduce new measures that would be even more disadvantageous.

A new state constitutional convention met in October 1849, and after many months a new constitutional instrument was written which was to be submitted to the voters in the general election of May 1850. Lieutenant Governor Helm, among other prominent Kentuckians, opposed the ratification of the new Constitution by the voters. His position placed him in direct opposition to the stand taken by his father-in-law, Ben Hardin, and caused an estrangement between the two which was healed only when Hardin lay on his death-bed. Helm made an impassioned plea against adoption of the new Constitution in a speech in which he said, "I was for reform, not revolution. I

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was for amending the Constitution, and not for obliterating every vital principle which it contained." While he believed that there were some good provisions in the new document he thought, for the most part, that the new instrument was an error. Despite his opposition, when the new Constitution was adopted by the voters and became law in June 1850, he urged the people to accept it peacefully and to give it a fair trial.

When the death of President Zachary Taylor in July 1850 resulted in the elevation of the Vice-President, Millard Fillmore, the new President offered the position of Attorney-General in the reformed cabinet to Governor John J. Crittenden of Kentucky. He accepted and resigned his post as Governor of Kentucky on July 31, 1850. This action resulted in the succession of Lieutenant Governor John Larue Helm as the eighteenth governor of Kentucky. Helm completed Crittenden's term until September 5, 1851, when Lazarus W. Powell was inaugurated as his successor. During his term of office, 1850-1851, Helm proved himself a strong governor although he did not run for election himself in 1851. After serving for a little over thirteen months as Governor, Helm ended his political career in 1853 by serving as a Whig presidential elector from Kentucky. He voted for the Whig candidate in the 1852 presidential election, General Winfield Scott, who lost to Franklin Pierce, his democratic opponent.

From 1851 to 1854 Helm resumed his law practice in Elizabethtown. During that time he acted as counsel for Matt Ward in one of the most noted murder trials that ever took place in Kentucky. The venue was moved to Elizabethtown because Helm as defense attorney felt that Ward could not receive a fair trial in Louisville where he had shot and killed William H.G. Butler, one of that city's most popular citizens, in a moment of passion. As a result of Helm's masterly defense, Ward was acquitted.

Throughout his entire public career John Larue Helm had stood boldly for the Whig program of Henry Clay on tariff, internal improvements, and the national bank. As a Southern Whig he strongly advocated public improvements at the expense of the state. He worked diligently for the construction of the Louisville and Nashville Turnpike and as early as 1836 from his office in the state House of Representatives had favored the establishment of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad which was afterwards built. He was a liberal subscriber to the original stock of the road and his influence with the

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capitalists of the State contributed largely to the success of the gigantic undertaking. He was elected the first president of the L & N Railroad in 1854 and, owing to his wise and careful management, the line was finally completed. In 1859, when the first train crossed the Rolling Fork River, Helm, as president of the railroad, went aboard to greet his friends and neighbors who came in great crowds to wave their congratulations to him. Through his influence a clause was put in the charter of the railroad requiring that every train which passed through Elizabethtown stop at that city. Helm resigned the presidency of the L & N Railroad in 1860 because of a difference in opinion between himself and the majority of the board of directors as to policy of the company.

The presidential election of 1860 and the ensuing events of the Civil War resulted in the most trying period of John Larue Helm's entire life. Although his personal sympathies were in the interest of the South, Helm never favored secession from the Union. He believed that the peoples' regard for the Constitution of the United States would correct every evil under which his own section was suffering without resort to measures certain to divide the country. Despite his own political background as a Southern Whig, in 1860 he openly denounced the election of Abraham Lincoln (born near Hodgenville, Larue County; See the National Register landmark nomination form for Lincoln's Birthplace) and attempted to preserve Kentucky's neutrality. He acted as chairman of the famous meeting held in Louisville on January 8, 1861, in which the neutral policy of Kentucky was declared. He was open in his condemnation of the war but was equally ardent in his opposition to acts of secession.

Helm stood aloof from the conflict from its beginning to its end but suffered greatly from the interference of federal officials in his own private affairs. His oldest son, Ben Hardin Helm, and his son-in-law, Thomas H. Hays, cast their lot with the Confederacy and he did not feel justified in opposing them. Hays was married to Sarah Hardin Helm, the daughter of John Larue Helm, and his son, Ben Hardin Helm, was married to Emilie Todd, half-sister of Mary Todd Lincoln, the wife of President Abraham Lincoln. This situation caused Lincoln some embarrassment at the hands of the Federal Congressional Committee established to oversee the execution of the war because his wife's brother-in-law, Ben Hardin Helm, had become a brigadier-general in the Confederate army. Upon at least one occasion Lincoln voluntarily appeared before the committee to testify that neither his wife nor any other member of his family had ever

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been guilty of aiding, abetting, or giving comfort to the enemy.

Because of his honest opinions, former Governor Helm was classed as a rebel. Warrants were issued for his arrest and he was required to take an oath to support the Constitution of the United States. He did so, but this provided him with little peace. He continued to suffer continual harrassment throughout the war.

Perhaps the crowning insult and indignity to the former governor was his arrest in September 1862 along with several other prominent citizens of Hardin County. All were placed under guard and taken to Louisville. Through a coincidence, Governor James F. Robinson, a former friend, saw Helm in the cavalcade of prisoners and immediately used his influence to have the former governor released and returned to his home. To compound the misery of Helm and his family, word was received of the death of his oldest son, General Ben Hardin Helm, on September 23, 1863, in the Battle of Chickamanga while he was leading the First Brigade of Infantry.

The Civil War and its aftermath led John Larue Helm to change his political affiliation to the Democratic Party. In 1865 he was again elected to the State Senate in Kentucky where he continued to serve with honor and distinction until the end of his session. As chairman of the committee on federal relation he led a successful fight for the removal of all restrictive and punitive laws against the ex-Confederates, and on January 20, 1866, he offered a resolution for the benefit of the newly-freed Negro slaves in Kentucky.

In February 1867 Helm received the nomination for Governor of Kentucky, on the Democratic ticket. Because he believed that trouble was brewing in Kentucky during the period of Reconstruction after the war, he considered it his duty to canvass the entire state in order to present a solid Democratic front. His reward was a stunning victory at the polls for the Democrats in Kentucky. In this memorable election on August 7, 1867, nearly every mayor and alderman, almost all the state legislature, the nine congressmen, and the two federal senators elected were members of his party. He was elected governor by a clear majority of 42, 000 votes over his combined radical and conservative opponents.

Helm's strenuous campaign resulted in his complete physical exhaustion, however. The high price he paid for the overwhelming Democratic victory was his own death at

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the age of 65 only one month after the election.

A rousing celebration with brass bands and special trains bringing friends and well-wishers to do Helm honor was arranged for the day of his inauguration but had to be cancelled because of his serious illness. When it became apparent that he would not be able to make the trip to Frankfort for the ceremonies which would install him as the twenty-fourth chief executive of the Commonwealth, his wife was able to arrange to have the ceremony at their home, Helm Place. The residence thereby gained the distinction of being the only home of any Kentucky governor ever to be used for inaugural ceremonies. Legend says that his bed was placed in the library, the front room to the right of the mansion as you enter the front door. The retiring Governor was present as the oath of office was administered to the new Governor, on September 3, 1867. Immediately after he was sworn in, Governor Helm handed the Commission as Secretary of State to Colonel Samuel B. Churchill. He was too weak to sign the Commission of Colonel Frank Wolford as Adjutant General but Wolford was appointed by Helm's successor as governor, Lieutenant Governor John W. Stevenson of Covington. Because he was able to make the difficult but successful transition from the Whig to the Democratic Party after the Civil War, he became the only man ever to serve as governor of the state who holds the distinction of having served once as a member of one major party, the Whig, during 1850-51, and again as a member of the other major party, the Democratic, in 1867.

From the diary of his crippled daughter, Mary, we learn of Governor Helm's last days in a moving passage:

He appreciated with honest pride the honor that had been conferred upon him by the people; and he appeared, also, to keenly feel the responsibility he had assumed. He loved Kentucky better than his life, and he seemed to be filled with sad forebodings for the future of his beloved state. During the few days that he was her Governor he expressed with intense determination, "come weal or woe" to guard her liberties and her rights to resist any invasion of either, no matter from what quarter it might come.

Helm died on September 7, 1867, after serving as Governor only five days, the shortest term of a Kentucky governor except for that of William Goebel, inaugurated on his

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death-bed after being shot by an assassin in 1900. John Larue Helm was buried in the old Helm Family cemetery near his home.

After the death of the Governor, Helm Place was inherited by his son, John Larue Helm, Jr. He and his wife, the former Lucy Amelia Washington of Nashville, Tennessee, had five children, all of whom were born at Helm Place and grew up there. The new owner, who represented the fourth generation of Helms to live on the land, operated the farm and also practiced law. He was a director of the L. & N. R.R. for several years up to 1901. He was a director of the First National Bank in Elizabethtown and later when it became the First Hardin National Bank he served as its director until his death in Louisville in 1917. He made a fortune as a tobacconist in Louisville and served as a director of the Columbia Trust Company. He ran for the position of delegate to the 1891 State Constitutional Convention but was defeated by the much younger Harvey Harold Smith by a small majority.

Helm and his wife, Lucy, are credited with making their home, Helm Place, the show place it became. In addition to the numerous additions to the house and the landscaping they provided, they entertained in a lavish manner.

After the turn of the twentieth century it became the custom of the Helm family to spend their winters in Louisville or elsewhere, living at their home in Hardin County during the summer. During that time John L. Helm, III, lived on the place and operated the farm, while his aunt, Mrs. M.H. Marriott, kept house for him. He thus became the last representative of five Helm generations to live on the land originally granted to the first pioneer of the family, Captain Thomas Helm, by the State of Virginia for his services during the Revolutionary War. In 1912 when the Helm Place and farm were sold to the Hardin Realty Company, a local firm in Elizabethtown which intended to cut the vast amount of timber on the property, the last of the Helms moved to Louisville and out of the history of Hardin County. Helm Place was thereafter to pass through the hands of several additional owners, often to the disadvantage of the house.

After the timber was cut on the Helm Place the Hardin Realty Company soon sold the property to Taylor Watkins and his son-in-law, A. H. Douglas. Both the Watkins and the Douglas families lived at Helm Place for a number of years.

On January 28, 1919, the property was sold to the Gabbert Land Company, a corporation consisting of M. H. Gabbert and the husbands of his three daughters. Mr.

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and Mrs. Gabbert and their daughters and husbands lived in the house and operated the farm that year but held a huge, widely advertised auction on December 12, 1919 (see photo 1). L. L. Kennedy and his wife, Lizzie, purchased the house and over 200 acres of land at the auction but never lived in it during the 19 years they owned it. During that time several tenants the land and occupied the house or the tenant house which was located in the field on Dixie Highway about where the Helmwood Shopping Center is now operated.

For many years the house remained vacant and deteriorated rapidly (see photos 5 and 7). Its shutters hung away or fell off altogether. It was used as a barn. Wheat was stored in the double parlors and hay and corn were kept in the dining room. The grounds were treated as public property during this time and were popular for picnics and political speakings. Public barbecues were held on the family cemetery hill.

On December 5, 1938, L. L. Kennady sold Helm Place to Judge J. R. Layman. Although Judge Layman owned it for only a short period of time he made drastic changes in the appearance of the house. The two saddle rooms were removed and a front porch added, embellished with two-story white columns. The Victorian additions on the south side were also removed.

On July 12, 1939, Judge Layman sold the property to Hayes Burnett. About the latter part of 1939 or early 1940 Mrs. Porter Smith rented the house and opened an antique shop and catering service there. On December 31, 1943, Mr. Burnett sold Helm Place with about 100 acres of ground, to Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Hobbs who sold 77 acres with the house to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Marion on January 30, 1945.

The Marions restored the house and grounds as far as possible. No change was made in the structure of the main block of the house but they built the one-story brick service wing at the rear.

A few years after the death of her husband, Mrs. Marion sold Helm Place to Dr. Robert E. Robbins of Elizabethtown on November 24, 1970. Reserving the frontage on the highway and other acreage, Dr. Robbins sold the house with a few acres to Mr. and Mrs. Robert L. Wright in July 1971. The Wrights made Helm Place their home until early in 1975 when they leased it to the North Central Comprehensive Care Center. It is now used by this agency for offices.

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New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), II, pp. 928-930. (continued)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,6 | 5,9,9 | 1,9,0 | 4,1 | 7,4 | 0,8,0  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
C 1,6 | 5,9,9 | 5,3,0 | 4,1 | 7,3 | 9,2,0

B 1,6 | 5,9,9 | 3,6,0 | 4,1 | 7,4 | 1,8,0  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
D 1,6 | 5,9,9 | 3,5,0 | 4,1 | 7,3 | 8,0,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mrs. Wilbur Terry and

Richerson

CI /WEL

ORGANIZATION

Hardin County Representatives, Kentucky Heritage Commission

STREET & NUMBER

104 Bridge Street

TELEPHONE

(502) 564-3741

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort

Kentucky

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

~~FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE~~ SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

ATTEST: DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



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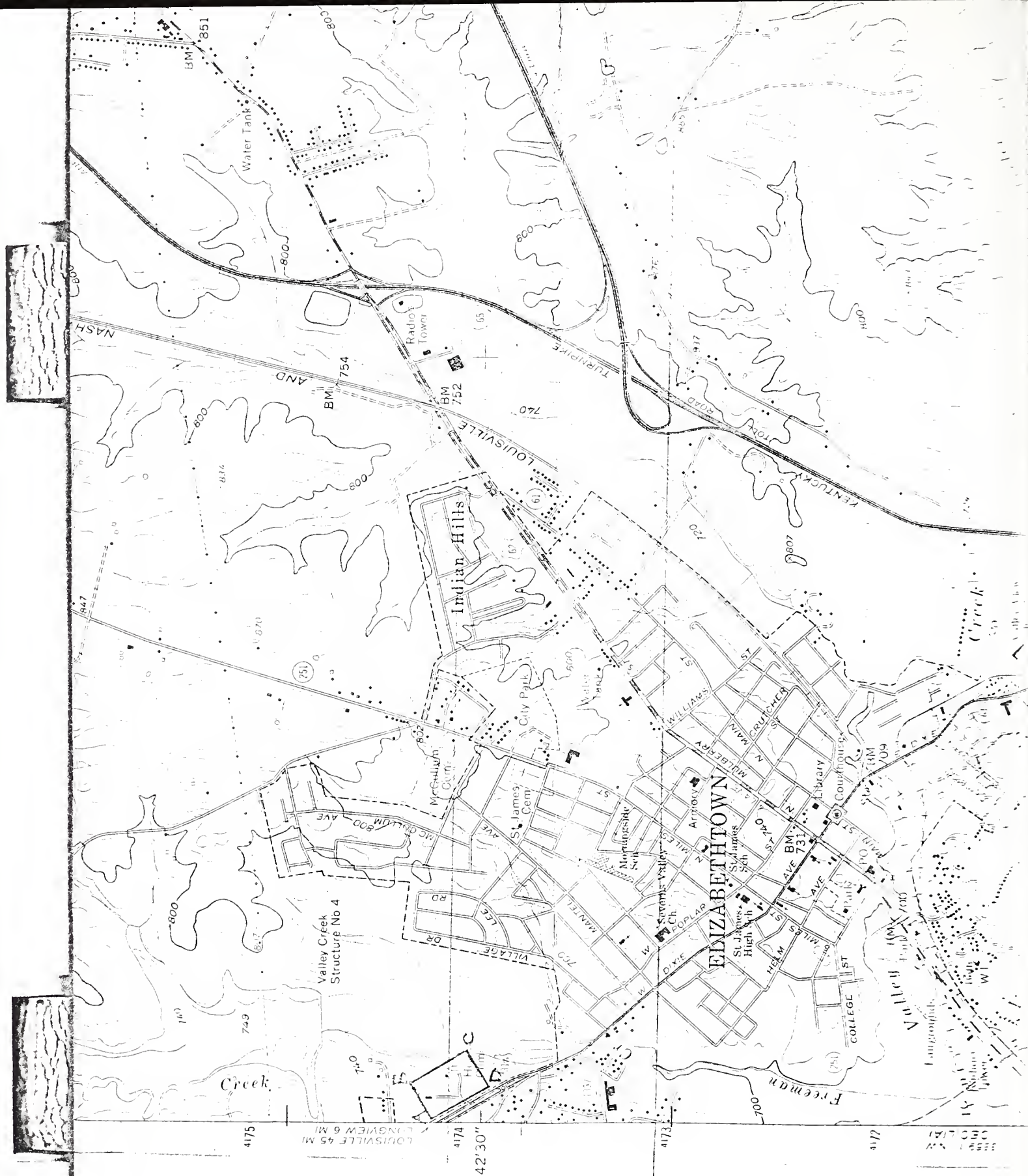
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Helm Place, Elizabethtown, Kentucky  
Royal Photo Company, Louisville  
Kentucky, now in possession of Mrs.  
Paul Marion. 1912  
Photo 1.

Notice of acution of property to be  
held on December 12, 1919, with  
view of house from southeast.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12TH, 1919  
10:00 A. M.

**"One of the Show Places of Kentucky"**

## A black and white photograph of a large, multi-story brick house. The house features a prominent chimney on the left side and a porch on the right. The house is surrounded by trees and a lawn. The image is oriented horizontally on the page.

This colonial residence with richly decorated interiors, is situated on a great forest down and sits on a commanding hill overlooking the mountains. It has very comfortable rooms, including study and exercise rooms, electric current being furnished by the city. A real home for the most discerning. Now open for your inspection.

This land is especially adapted to the growing of tobacco, corn, wheat, oats, clover, blue grass, and alfalfa. It is abundantly watered by never-failing springs. Has been operated principally as a stock farm, for which it is well equipped, with running water and electric lights in the barns. Was handed down by the Governor to his son, John Helm, who preserved its attractiveness and its fertility. Next and still fortunate, for seven years it was owned and cared for by that illustrious citizen, Mr. Taylor Watkins, who less than one year ago transferred it to M. H. Gabbert and others. All being men of means the farm has never had to "pay for itself." It is said by those who know it best that there is no better farm and no better improvements to be found in the county. It stands today preserved and unabused, ready to reward whoever on December 12 may prove its fortunate purchaser.

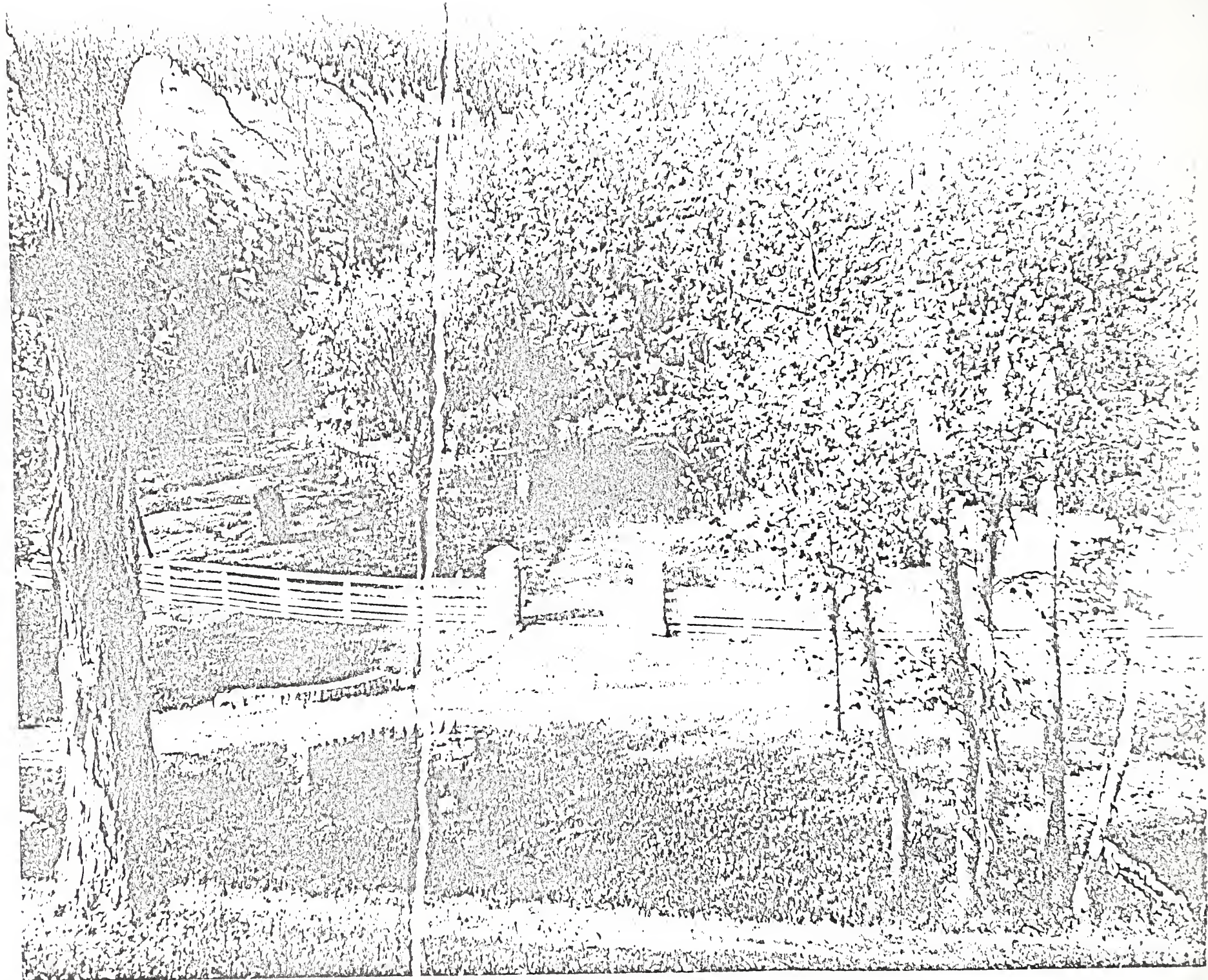
[illegible]

**Manager**

































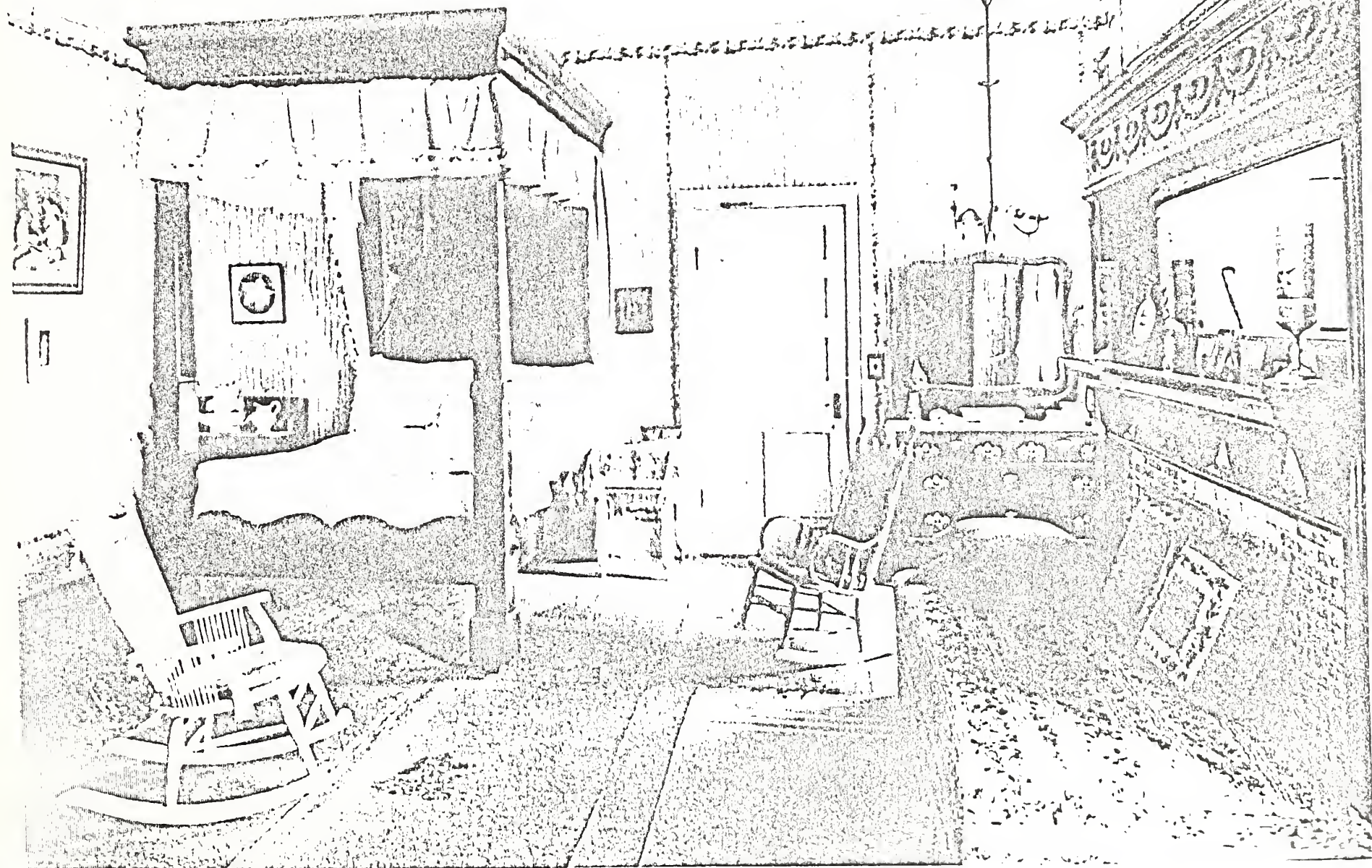




























Ground-level view of the Helm Cemetery today. The historic cemetery has been preserved, but adjacent land has been converted to commercial use.



